

SHOULD WE NOT WARN ONE ANOTHER?

The apostle Paul told Timothy, "For the time will come when they will not tolerate the healthy teaching; but according to their own lusts they will heap up to themselves teachers, having itching ears, and they will turn away their ear from the truth and will be turned aside to myths" (2 Tim. 4:3-4). In today's age of uncertainty, we see Paul's words fulfilled. Many Christian teachers avoid the warnings that occur throughout the New Testament, and many believers have ears only for words of comfort and affirmation. Those who seek such affirmation find it uncomfortable to hear the sober words of warning in the Bible. Discomfort aside, the many warnings in the New Testament embody healthy words that should alert all believers to consider their life and work before the Lord in the light of His coming judgment of His people (2 Cor. 5:10). If we are to be faithful to the Lord, we should heed these warnings for ourselves and warn others out of a proper heart and motive.

The Lord Jesus spoke two parables to His disciples in Matthew 25 warning them concerning what kind of life His saved ones should live and their need to be faithful in their service to Him. The first, the parable of the ten virgins—five prudent and five foolish—addresses the need of watchfulness for our living before the Lord (vv. 1-13). As prudent followers of Jesus, while we await His return, we should be watchful concerning our living to the extent that we gain a supply of the oil (the Spirit, v. 3; cf. Isa. 61:1) sufficient not only for our lamp (our regenerated spirit, Matt. 25:3; cf. Prov. 20:27) but also for our vessel (our soul, Matt. 25:4). The state of the five foolish virgins who missed the wedding feast is a warning to us of the real danger that if we live an unwatchful Christian life, we will miss something precious—the reward of the wedding feast in the kingdom (v. 10) (See *Life-study of Matthew*, Message 64).

The second is the parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14-30). In it "a man," signifying Christ, distributed his wealth to "his own slaves," signifying the believers, as he was about to leave on a journey, and he settled accounts with them upon his return. Those slaves who were faithful and had gained a profit by their labor were generously rewarded, but the unfaithful slave who returned only what he had been given was rebuked and severely punished. This parable warns us that, as slaves of our Lord who are gifted by Him for His work, we will be judged at His return to determine our faithfulness and whether our labor merits reward or warrants loss. The punishing of the unfaithful slaves is a warning that our Christian work may not be acceptable to the Lord and may result in the loss of our participation in the ruling aspect of the coming kingdom. (See *Life-study of Matthew*, Message 65)

Warnings in Paul's Epistles

Paul warned the New Testament believers about the same matters covered by the Lord in the two parables in Matthew 25, saying that they should take heed both to their living before the Lord and their service to Him, as the following examples from 1 Corinthians, Hebrews, and Colossians show.

In 1 Corinthians Paul used the example of the children of Israel wandering in the wilderness as a warning to the troubled church in Corinth (10:1-13). The children of Israel had a good beginning to their journey. All "passed through the sea," "were baptized...in the cloud and in the sea" (in the Spirit and in water), "ate the same spiritual food," and "drank the same spiritual drink" (vv. 1-4). Despite such a good beginning, "with most of them God was not well pleased, for they were strewn along in the wilderness" (v. 5). All but the two overcomers, Joshua and Caleb, perished without reaching the good land. Paul then says, "Now these things occurred as examples to us..." (v. 6); this is a warning to us, the current sojourners on the way, to live an overcoming Christian life. Brother Lee wrote:

This book [First Corinthians] takes the history of the children of Israel in the Old Testament as a type of the New Testament believers...They [the Corinthians] are warned here (v. 11) not to repeat the history of the children of Israel in doing evil against God, as illustrated in vv. 6-11...This should be a solemn warning to all New Testament believers. It was especially applicable to the Corinthians, who were in danger of repeating the failure of the children of Israel in the wilderness. (*Holy Bible Recovery Version [RcV]*, 1 Corinthians 10:6, Footnote 1)

Paul also warned the Corinthian believers to consider how they labored in building the church (3:10-17). He laid Christ as the foundation of the church in Corinth and warned the Corinthian believers saying, "But let each man

take heed how he builds upon it [the foundation]" (vv. 10-11). To take heed means to be warned. Paul's warning had the coming judgment seat of Christ in view, when all believers' works will be judged (2 Cor. 5:10, Rom. 14:10). Whether believers are rewarded or suffer loss will depend upon what kind of material they build with, either precious—gold, silver, and precious stones, signifying the Triune God experienced in His salvation—or worthless—wood, grass, and stubble, signifying what man is in his natural life (1 Cor. 3:12-15).

"Gold, silver, and precious stones signify the various experiences of Christ in the virtues and attributes of the Triune God. It is with these that the apostles and all spiritual believers build the church on the unique foundation of Christ." (RcV, 1 Cor. 3:12, Footnote 2)

All the precious materials can withstand the fire of the coming judgment (v. 13). Wood, grass, and stubble cannot.

Wood, grass, and stubble signify the knowledge, realization, and attainments that come from the believers' natural background...and the natural way of living (which is mainly in the soul and is the natural life)" (RcV, 1 Cor. 3:12, Footnote 3)

We must take heed as to how we build the church because Christ's second coming will manifest what kind of work we have done (v. 13). Concerning this Paul warns, "If anyone's work which he has built upon the foundation remains, he will receive a reward; if anyone's work is consumed, he will suffer loss, but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire" (vv. 14-15).

The book of Hebrews has five major warnings. The first warns us to give heed to what is spoken about the Son (Heb. 2:1-4). The second tells us not to come short of the promised rest (3:7-4:13). The third admonishes us to be brought on to maturity (5:11-6:20). The fourth exhorts us to come forward to Christ and not shrink back (10:19-39) and warns us not to forsake our assembling together (v. 25). The fifth calls us to run the race and not fall away from grace (12:1-29). All contain sober words such as "let us fear therefore..." (4:1), "'The Lord will judge His people.' It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (10:30-31), and "For our God is also a consuming fire" (12:29).

Concerning the warnings in Colossians Brother Lee wrote,

In the short book of Colossians, Paul gives a number of warnings. In 2:4 he says, "This I say that no one may delude you with persuasive speech." In 2:8 he says, "Beware that no one carries you off as spoil through his philosophy and empty deceit." In 2:16 Paul warns the Colossian believers to let no one judge them in eating, drinking, or in respect of feasts, new moons, or of Sabbaths. In verse 18 Paul says, "Let no one purposely defraud you of your prize." Paul realized that many things were there to be utilized to lead the believers astray from Christ and the church life. The same is true today. (*Life-study of Colossians*, 431)

We reject superstitious warnings of impending doom and unprincipled attempts to frighten with tales of presumed temporal woe. At the same time, we must heed the sober New Testament warnings that produce a healthy fear in light of the coming judgment seat of Christ. Having been warned, we should also warn others. If we do not warn one another to live soberly before the Lord, we are not faithful to the Lord's Word and do a disservice to Him and to those around us. Today, rather than succumb to a "gospel" of numbing words of self-contentment and self-affirmation, we should rise up to faithfully herald the New Testament warnings, not out of fearmongering but out of love. Like Paul, we must be faithful to make known the mystery of Christ, "whom we announce, admonishing every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man full-grown in Christ" (Col 1:28). Such admonishing, or warning, will motivate us and others to live an overcoming Christian life in opposition to the current of today's world. If we heed these warnings, they will become in us an incentive to cultivate a living and service that please the Lord and to cooperate with Him for the building up of the church in this age, for the bringing in of the Kingdom with its reward in the next age, and for the fulfillment of God's purpose in eternity.